



XIV. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report summarizes the results of a comprehensive Customer Satisfaction Survey in November 1997 to assess the effectiveness of each of the programs administered by the Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA or Agency): unfair labor practice proceedings, representation proceedings, negotiability appeals, exceptions to arbitration awards and collaborative and alternative dispute resolution programs. The overall objective of this survey was to ascertain customers' perceptions of the Agency's services and how these services can be improved to meet the customers' needs. The survey was designed to measure the following: customer satisfaction of the Agency's processes, impact of FLRA's decisions and the General Counsel's policies and guidelines, and the effectiveness of the work performed by FLRA. This is a base-line survey. Responses to surveys in future years will be compared to the results of this survey.

The survey results are based on the respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness and quality of service, that was secured from the respondents' response to specific multiple-choice survey questions and their written comments. The survey consisted of groups of questions to be answered by all respondents and by specific groups of respondents based on cases in which they were a participant during 1996 and/or 1997. The first section of the survey addressed perceptions about how well the FLRA has met its goals and objectives as set forth in its strategic plan. All respondents were asked to answer these questions. Four sections of the survey addressed perceptions about specific programs: Unfair Labor Practice Charges (ULP), Representation Petitions (REP), Negotiability Appeals (NEG) and Exceptions to Arbitration Awards (ARB). Respondents were asked to provide perceptions about these programs only if they were a participant in cases that involved the program during 1996 and/or 1997.

Three other sections included in the survey were designed for all respondents to answer: Perceptions about the quality of decisions rendered by the Authority component; alternative dispute resolution and labor-management training services; and initiatives implemented by the Agency, the Office of the General Counsel and the Authority. Written comments within each of the sections of the survey and overall comments were recorded by respondents. Demographic information and an overall level of satisfaction were gathered in the last section of the survey from all respondents.

In order to fully flesh-out the rich data that have been collected in this survey, the responses for many questions have been broken-out in cross-tabulations by program participated in (i.e., Unfair Labor Practice Charges, Representation Petitions, Negotiability Appeals, and Exceptions to Arbitration Awards) and by the role the respondents represented before the FLRA (i.e., Agency, Union, and Individual). For the most part, the discussion of differences relate to the role represented by the respondents and not the program participated in unless the program is the major topic of the question. Tables are presented for these multiple-choice questions.



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The written comments are all included in the report. They reflect both very positive and very negative comments concerning different programs and complaints. The comments were edited to remove identifying information concerning who the respondents were and information targeting particular FLRA employees, Federal agencies, and unions. In the last section of the survey, respondents were asked to provide any additional comments, in general, or for specific program areas. This last section provides a rich source of ideas and recommendations for possible exploration of possible improvement changes for FLRA programs.

Of 4,703 surveys distributed, 298 were returned with unknown addresses. This effectively reduced the universe to 4,405 potential respondents. At the end of the period allowed for return of forms, 1,674 completed forms had been received and entered into the data base. The 1,674 surveys represented a 38% response rate based on the total of potential respondents

Large users of FLRA services, that is those individuals and organizations who filed more than 30 charges during 1996 and/or 1997, reflected less satisfaction with the FLRA. In general, they did not perceive that FLRA was meeting optimally the goals and objectives laid out by FLRA in its five-year Strategic Plan. FLRA may want to establish a special outreach communications program for this group of customers and include focus group interviews or special meetings with some of the key players to ascertain how this perception and its reality can be changed.

Four major themes that arose from studies of groups of questions and comments made by the respondents were separately evaluated. These were: (1) timeliness, (2) resolving disputes, (3) improving labor management relationships, and (4) fairness, i.e., absence of bias, in decisions.

Timeliness of decisions was identified as an area that needs to be addressed, timeliness was a relative issue. Some respondents thought the time it took to conduct an investigation and make a decision was a major problem, while others reported that the turnaround was quite acceptable. Timeliness was not identified as a problem in Regional Offices for initiating elections, beginning investigations, conducting hearing, nor of rendering decisions. The major timeliness issues related to Authority decisions. This may reflect communication issues more than actual timeliness issues; i.e., the need to continuously keep FLRA customers informed as to the steps and time frames required to carry out the decision-making process and the status of a particular decision process.

The efforts that FLRA makes to settle disputes was almost uniformly considered to be good. More than half of its customers (combined total of those who agree or neither agree nor disagree) believes the FLRA provides quality services that resolves disputes in the Federal labor-management community. Almost as many customers believe that the FLRA assists parties to constructively manage their disputes. However, when asked about the actual impact of this effort, respondents were less positive.

Perceptions about the usefulness of Collaboration and Alternative Dispute Resolution services initiative of the Authority should be considered with caution. The lack of a substantial number of respondents to questions about the effectiveness of CADR assistance lead us to determine that no meaningful conclusions could be drawn. Additional data gathering in this area is recommended.



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There was almost universal praise for the various programs that FLRA has established to provide agencies and unions with information and training in various aspects of the statute, regulations and policies. Town meetings by the General Counsel were well received. The Web Site was also praised and the efforts that FLRA is making to improve it were considered excellent.

In terms of perceived fairness and the absence of bias, the results were mixed. The universal perceptions was that FLRA employees are well qualified and fair in the dealing with FLRA's customers. Further, the reasons behind decisions were considered to be clear, even if the respondents did not agreed with the decisions.

Because of the large percentage of respondents who answered "neither agree nor disagree" to some questions concerning the organizational outcomes or the actual effectiveness of FLRA programs, it would appear that the respondents were having difficulty evaluating long term effectiveness in a short time frame of one or two years. Organization change takes place over extended periods of time, i.e. three to five years. Bureaucracies are difficult to change in a short time. However, this is an area that focus group interviews or other surveys might be used to assess why the perception of outcome measures are not more positive.

Because many users of FLRA services are aware of only those aspects of FLRA responsibilities that deal with their issues, there needs to be more in-depth assessment of the concerns expressed by respondents through the written comments. This can be accomplished through the conduct of focus group interviews with customers knowledgeable about specific programs.

Finally, it should be noted that the survey respondents were candid and honest about their perceptions. They are to be commended for the extensive information provided to both the closed-ended and open-ended items. The data are invaluable to improving the mission of the FLRA.